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Message Text

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PAGE 01 PORT O 03219 091716Z
74-61
ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03
NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 AID-05
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R 091615Z DEC 76
FM AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0082
INFO AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN
AMEMBASSY CARACAS
AMEMBASY GEORGETOWN
AMEMBASSY KINGSTON
AMEMBASSY PARAMARIBO

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PFOR, SOPN, TD, GY, PINT
SUBJECT: CRITICISM OF GUYANA MOUNTS IN TRINIDAD

REF: PORT OF SPAIN 2235

SUMMARY: THE PUBLIC CONTROVERSY OVER THE LACK OF PRESS FREEDOM IN GUYANA AND PRIME MINISTER BURNHAM'S STATEMENTS ABOUT ECONOMIC AUSTERITY HAVE PRODUCED STRONG CRITICISM OF GUYANA FROM THE PRESS AND BUSINESS SECTORS OF TRINIDAD. THE DISPUTE HAS BROUGHT TO THE SURFACE NEGATIVE VIEWS ABOUT A FELLOW CARICOM STATE WHICH THE GOTT HAS REFRAINED FROM STATING ITSELF BUT WHICH HAVE LONG BEEN HELD BY THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY AND MUCH OF THE EAST INDIAN POPULATION OF TRINIDAD IN PARTICULAR. END SUMMARY

1. THE OUTGOING PRESIDENT OF THE CARIBBEAN PUBLISHERS AND BROADCASTERS ASSOCIATION, KENNETH GORDON, TOLD THE ASSOCIATION'S CONVENTION IN TOBAGO ON NOVEMBER 18-19 THAT HE WAS CONVINCED THAT "FREEDOM OF THE PRESS (IN GUYANA) HAS LONG CEASED TO EXIST". THIS COMMENT HAS SPARKED A DISCUSSION IN TRINIDAD NOT ONLY OF PRESS FREEDOM IN GUYANA BUT ALSO OF THE GENERAL CONDITION OF LIFE
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PAGE 02 PORT O 03219 091716Z

IN THAT COUNTRY. IT HAS BROUGHT TO THE SURFACE THE DIS-

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006

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APPROVAL AND APPREHENSION WITH WHICH DEVELOPMENTS IN
GUYANA ARE VIEWED BY MANY TRINIDADIANS.

2. GORDON'S REMARKS AND THE ENSUING WALK-OUT BY THE TWO
GUYANESE REPRESENTATIVES AT THE CONFERENCE WERE FOLLOWED
BY APPEARANCES BY BOTH GORDON AND RON SANDERS OF THE
GUYANA BROADCASTING SERVICE ON THE TRINIDAD EVENING TELE-
VISION NEWS PROGRAM TO DEFEND THEIR POSITIONS. THESE
INTERVIEWS IN TURN PRECIPITATED ANOTHER INCIDENT IN WHICH
THE GUYANESE-CITIZEN BUT TRINIDAD-RESIDENT INTERVIEWER
WHO CONDUCTED BOTH INTERVIEWS WAS SUMMARILY BANISHED FROM
THE GOVERNMENT-OWNED STATION WHEN HE APPEARED TO TILT TO
THE GUYANESE SIDE IN HANDLING THE TWO PROGRAMS.

3. THE TRINIDAD "EXPRESS," OF WHICH GORDON IS THE
MANAGING DIRECTOR, PREDICTABLY ECHOED HIS STATEMENTS IN
AN EDITORIAL SEVERAL DAYS LATER. THE "EXPRESS" WROTE
THAT IT WOULD "PLAY ITS PART TO PREVENT THE INFECTION
(OF A CONTROLLED PRESS) FROM SPREADING TO THIS COUNTRY
WHERE THE PRESS IS FREE AND WILL WORK WITH ITS PARTNERS
IN REGIONALISM TO MAINTAIN THE PRINCIPLE OF PRESS FREE-
DOM IN THE CARIBBEAN". THE "EXPRESS" ALSO HAS CARRIED
A PROMINENT COLUMN WHICH POKED GENTLE BUT POINTED FUN
AT THE SOCIALIST/ROYALIST PRETENSIONS OF PRIME MINISTER
BURNHAM AND RIDICULED "SOCIALIST THRUSTING" IN A
TELLING MANNER.

4. THE "SUNDAY GUARDIAN" STRONGLY CRITICIZED THE WHOLE
GUYANESE SITUATION ON NOVEMBER 28 IN AN EDITORIAL EN-
TITLED "PARADIS LOST: BY BURNHAM". THE "GUARDIAN"
POINTED OUT WITH SOME RELISH THAT NO ONE, SPECIFICALLY
NOT THE "DEDICATED SOCIALISTS" FROM TRINIDAD, WISHES TO
EMIGRATE TO GUYANA. THE EDITORIAL CONTRASTED THE
STANDARDS OF LIVING OF "PROGRESSIVE"GUYANA AND "SOCIALIST"
JAMAICA WITH THAT OF "PRAGMATIC"TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO.
THE EDITORIAL STATED THAT "OUR OBVIOUS DUTY IS TO MAKE
SURE THAT ...BABBLEMENT ABOUT THE DIRECTIONS OF SOCIALISM
AND THE IMMINENT COMING OF HEAVEN UPON EARTH ARE LAUGHED
OUT OF HEARING".

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5. THE TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO CHAMBER OF INDUSTRY AND
COMMERCE SEIZED UPON PRIME MINISTER BURNHAM'S RECENT
ADMISSION OF ECONOMIC DIFFICULTIES TO CLAIM THAT THE
GUYANESE SITUATION WAS A "VINDICATION OF THE FREE
ENTERPRISE SYSTEM" AND AN INDICATION THAT COUNTRIES
PURSUING SOCIALIST POLICIES ARE "INVARIABLY ECONOMICALLY
EMBARRASSED". THE CHAMBER SAID THAT THE MYTH THAT
GUYANA WAS ABLE THROUGH ITS GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED ECONOMY

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TO PROTECT ITS CITIZENS FROM RISING PRICES AND INFLATION
HAS BEEN "EXPLODED". SHORTLY AFTER THE CHAMBER'S STATE-
MENT WAS GIVEN TO THE PRESS, HOWEVER, IT WAS RECALLED
WITHOUT EXPLANATION AND HAS NOT BEEN RE-ISSUED. BRIEF
ACCOUNTS OF THE STATEMENT APPEARED IN ONLY ONE NEWSPAPER.

6. EVEN TRINIDAD'S LEFT FOUND OCCASION TO CRITICIZE
GUYANA RECENTLY. ONE OF THE LEADERS OF THE UNITED LABOR
FRONT, OIL UNION PRESIDENT GEORGE WEEKES, MADE PUBLIC A
TELEGRAM HE HAD SENT TO THE GOVERNMENT OF GUYANA PROTESTING
THE ARREST AND TRIAL OF DISSIDENT LEFTIST EUSI KWAYANA.
THE ULF AND ITS SUPPORTERS ARE MORE USUALLY FOUND AT
RALLIES DEMONSTRATING THEIR SOLIDARITY WITH THEIR GUYANESE
"COMRADES" AGAINST ATTEMPTS TO "DESTABILIZE" GUYANA.
7. COMMENT: ALTHOUGH THE TRINIDAD GOVERNMENT HAS IN-
DIRECTLY EXPRESSED ITS DISTASTE FOR THE POLICIES WHICH
GUYANA (AND TO A LESSER EXTENT JAMAICA) ARE FOLLOWING
(REFTEL PARA 8), IT HAS BEEN CAREFUL TO AVOID CRITICIZING
ANY OF ITS CARICOM PARTNERS DIRECTLY. THE RECALL OF THE
CHAMBER'S STATEMENT MAY, IN FACT, HAVE BEEN PROMPTED
BY PRESSURE FROM THE GOVERNMENT. NEVERTHELESS, THE
GOTT IS CLEARLY UNSYMPATHETIC WITH GUYANA'S PRESENT
PROBLEMS WHICH IT REGARDS AS LARGELY OF THAT COUNTRY'S
OWN MAKING.

8. MANY PROMINENT EAST INDIANS IN TRINIDAD HAVE, FOR
SOME TIME, BEEN PUBLICLY CRITICAL OF THE BURNHAM
GOVERNMENT, WHICH THEY BELIEVE HAS DISCRIMINATED
AGAINST GUYANA'S LARGE EAST INDIAN POPULATON. THEY
ALSO BELIEVE THAT THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT IN GUYANA IS
WELL ON ITS WAY TO DESTROYING THE INDIVIDUAL FREEDOMS
WHICH ARE ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT TO THE EAST INDIANS
LIVING IN THE WEST INDIES. THE LONG-HELD VIEW OF THE
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EAST INDIANS THAT GUYANA REPRESENTS AN OBJECT LESSON
TO TRINIDAD ON WHAT MUST NOT BE ALLOWED TO HAPPEN IN
TRINIDAD IS NOW BEING VOICED BY MORE AND MORE TRINI-
DADIANS.
FAY

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